

# “Accepting Responsibility in an Information Technology Changing Force!”

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*Lt Gen William T. Hobbins remarks to the Senior NCO Academy, graduating class 05-E. Gen Hobbins addressed the importance of technology in the joint force and identified the senior NCOs’ responsibilities for learning and executing new technology in the ever evolving Total Force. Gen Hobbins also provided several recommendations for a new attitude in mentoring the junior enlisted personnel.*

## *Responsibility*

It always humbles me when I get the opportunity to speak before such an impressive group. Being humble is good, because with your new rank and responsibility you are more powerful with an unassuming stature. But humble doesn’t mean being passive, especially when it’s about making a difference. Your Service has recognized your potential as leaders, and honed your skills with this course. And make no mistake, our nation and our alliances need leaders like you during this bold and exciting time ... a time when our joint force is transforming at a faster rate than any other period in our history. It’s amazing when you think about how far aviation has come as a combat arm ... during World War II, it took nearly 3,000 sorties to eliminate a single target. Today, one aircraft can destroy multiple targets in a single sortie. Back in WWII, we put a quarter on the map, circled it with a pen and tried to hit it – now we try to hit the quarter.

Airpower has played a significant role in the overall success of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In fact, we have used nearly all of our combat aircraft types and total force specialties in Iraq. While this war featured 40 percent fewer troops than Operation Desert Storm 14 years ago, the amount of available communications bandwidth increased nearly 600 percent. And our GPS satellite constellation provided bomb accuracies to within 10 feet. The point is we are doing more with

less people because we are using information and connectivity with networks to enable the warfighters.

As impressive as the technological gains were during Operation Iraqi Freedom, we are looking at even greater changes in the future in both our systems and processes. Today our senior NCOs come up with the answers, especially in the high ops environments. For example, the commanders at the AOC wanted to talk to the pilots flying sorties in Afghanistan, but conventional communications did not provide this long range capability in the rough mountain terrain. One of our smart NCOs had a hand in designing a method for installing an Iridium phone into the wing pod on our aircraft to provide constant communication with the AOC....and it worked superbly!

We have the most technologically savvy airmen, soldiers, and sailors we've ever seen. Many of you probably use personal data assistants (PDAs) to do your jobs. Some are experts at Microsoft office products, others know the inner workings of the network servers. Whatever it is, nearly all of your jobs require a high level of technological know-how.

Nevertheless, with such change comes disruption and uncertainty...it attacks our comfort zone! Your superiors rely upon you to understand information technology and the benefits it brings, to step up and embrace and implement those changes; and *most importantly*, lead our younger enlisted force through the "why fors" of the changes.

You have a responsibility as senior NCOs to stay ahead of these changes by reading about and understanding them. You have to "GET IT", then "SHARE IT" with your young airmen. Don't be too proud to "get it" *explained* from them as well. As a fighter pilot, who became the Air Force's senior communicator, I had to ask what I thought were some dumb questions of my communicators...and guess what I found? They didn't have the operational sight picture to get it either. I hope you'll be able to explain why we are relying on them in the future to analyze information and its uses. Accuracy counts the first time—because it will be shared instantly and you'll need to be able to explain why there are more central call-in services vs. face-to-face contact—it's simply all about making us more efficient and effective.

### *Chief of Warfighting Integration and CIO*

Changes in technology and processes are inevitable in our Total Force if we are to remain the world's premier fighting force, a fact of life that I am keenly aware of as the Air Force's acting Chief of Warfighting Integration and Chief Information Officer.

What do our warfighters and key decision makers have in common? They are dependent on information generated and shared across multiple platforms. One of my key responsibilities is to determine how we best leverage current and emerging technologies with warfighting and operational support systems. But it's more than just closing the seams in what our Chief of Staff calls the C4ISR kill chain. It's helping re-forge how information is received, categorized and used, as well as bought! The future involves understanding how we communicate more effectively. For example, we have a technology we've developed with our sister services, particularly the Army, called "remote operations video enhanced receiver," or "ROVER". While in JFEX at Nellis AFB, the CSAF and I were standing in a parking lot of 700 cars and a Senior NCO with a laptop. The NCO was using the laptop to communicate to an A-10 on approach, 15 miles away. Using the ROVER technology, the TAC-P and the pilot had the same Electro-optical/Infra-red camera video, allowing the controller on the ground (TAC-P) to direct the aircraft to the target with both the pilot and the control seeing the actual target at the same time.

The warfighter will lean more heavily on you for its operational support modernization, one of my key focus areas and all of you are or will be important leaders in this endeavor. According to former acting Secretary of the Air Force Michael Dominguez, ops support modernization is our initiative where we are most likely to recoup money and other resources to improve our tooth-to-tail ratio. In other words, we'd like more "tooth" and less "tail." Today, the Air Force spends two-thirds of its dollars on support systems, with the other third going towards investment in future weapon systems. We need to shift some of the dollars spent on support, particularly the older stove-piped legacy systems, to the future weapon systems.

Ahh – but we have integration challenges associated with ops support modernization too. For example, in the area of deployment management, while moving an F-16 squadron east to the

AOR in support of OIF, we used 61 data sources and 32 people intense processes. That's too many. Because many like you recently helped us identify unneeded steps, we have improved AEF deployment management, reducing processing time by more than 80 percent, from 131 to 23 days. And we've reduced the number of steps in one deployment process from 76 to 16. Additionally, when we have a base disaster, our disaster control response group improved their response time by 20 percent, increasing our chances of saving lives after accidents. Our next focus will be on improving crash net processes, medical responses, and unit control center operating standards. Step by step look at each action—get to those value-added steps and use IT to make us efficient. Personnel services delivery will do that in the next few years. This newly developed IT system for personnel management will make 1500 airmen available to do other things...senior NCOs helped solve this issue with information processing ideas.

### *Your Responsibilities*

Now let me recap how all this relates to your responsibilities as Senior NCOs. You began to learn about leadership and accepting responsibility as a child. First, you watched your parents, then your teachers and other kids at school, and eventually your fellow enlisted and your officers. You've even received formal training in leadership, and had many opportunities within your service to exercise that leadership. It begins as an attitude—a willingness to step forward and accept responsibility—not just for yourself and *your* actions, but also for your unit, your service, and your nation. I hope that the way you *think* and *lead* will be along the lines of “any job worth doing is worth doing better.”

Historically, the strength of the American militaries has sprung from its cadre of professional NCOs. If I can't count on you to try to make the Total Force better, who will do that? You won't always succeed at this task, but believe me, you'll feel good *every time you try*. How often do you think we get our way in the Pentagon when it comes to buying programs or solving interoperability problems with the other Services? Certainly not as often as we'd like. But I keep pushing because I know that some days I *do* make a difference. Personal satisfaction has very little to do with a job title...it comes from staying involved, looking out for the next person, attaching yourself to the feeling that *you* are making a difference. I challenge you to motivate

others to accept that same kind of responsibility...Senior NCOs have more impact on this philosophy than anyone else.

Try this: ... some of our greatest innovators haven't always seen the "big picture." For example, here are a few memorable quotes:

- Ken Olson, president and founder of Digital Equipment Corporation, in 1977 said: "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."
- Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, in 1943 said: "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."
- A Western Union internal memo in 1876 said: "This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."
- Finally, Bill Gates said in 1981: "Who in their right mind would ever need more than 640K of RAM?"

As those quotes illustrate, some of society's most successful movers and shakers had trouble foreseeing the benefits of a new technology. But using Bill Gates as the example, if you roll with the changes when they come, and give it your full effort, you can still be successful. Our nation needs you Senior NCOs to roll with those changes, figure out the benefits to be gained and educate your troops on how it all fits together.

Often those technological innovations come to us because some NCO in the field had an idea and wouldn't stop talking about it until it got bought and implemented. Another example... remember the days when we had to fill out hard copies of travel vouchers and hand carry them to finance? Nobody liked that, but we didn't have anything better. We now fill them out and route them electronically...even from home. Same thing happened with the leave forms ... now we manage time off electronically through Leaveweb. And it was probably some persistent Senior NCO leading the charge who got those changes implemented. But here's our future sight picture....one data entry satisfying many applications at one time.

Let me give you an example of how integration of information technology enables the warfighter: when a maintainer completes her work replacing a broken part on a jet, I'd like her to make one click in her PDA which will result in many functions at once: it tells finance to pay for it; it tells supply to reorder it; it tells industry to make another one; it tells the depot what failed and why so they can adjust; and it tells ops that the jet is fixed ... all with one click of an information warrior's stylus. This won't come about easily because it is not in our nature to accept change.

You, as Senior NCOs, may have a cultural mindset to overcome—you are experts in *today's* “way of doing business”. But as I mentioned, our systems will change rapidly and often—and I need you to help the entire fighting force to “get it”. Think of these new information technology changes as “stress reduction initiatives” ... we are not looking to replace people! For instance, maybe a process or technological improvement would allow us to stop using an enlisted civil engineer specialist “out of hide” to perform system administration duties at her squadron and allow her to do her regular job. The days of out-of-hide taskings have got to go.

### *Information Management Strategy*

Information is every bit as valuable as our warfighting platforms, and it must be treated as an asset to achieve the “5 rights”—the right information, to the right person, in the right place, at the right time, to make the right decision. We can't afford to keep passing along electronic files to some digital landfill that no one can get to. We need everyone to be responsible for information so it's retrievable from the gitgo, whenever we need it, wherever we are. To make that happen in the Air Force we are consolidating our different information disciplines into a single enterprise-wide strategy for information management. We are working on systems that will properly tag the information you create “automatically”, so information services like Discovery can find it. We are transforming the warfighter's search time into analysis time.

But along with this future service comes responsibility to enter the information correctly. Here's a true example of where the payoff is ... we had an Air Force NCO stationed in Baghdad who was tasked to build an armory at the airport. When he told his leadership he had no experience in this area, he was told to “go figure it out.” Talk about being put into a tough spot!!! So he did

figure it out, by sending out a query through one of the communities of practice on “Air Force Knowledge Now”—one of the Air Force portal modules. What did he find? An Air National Guard unit had just accomplished the same task in Mosul and sent him all of their information. He had the armory up and running in no time.

The NCO’s task would have been much less painful if we had a solid information management system in place ... the redeployed Guard unit’s information would have been properly tagged and categorized, available for anyone’s quick query rather than awaiting random responses.

I’ll use the US military medical transport system as another example: during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, we sent 60 percent of our patients to the wrong departure base and 50 percent of the patients leaving the country to the wrong hospital. Many poor folks ended up in the wrong place for their medical care!

Today, we have a system called the TRANSCOM Regulating and C2 Evacuation System, better known as “TRAC2ES”. It gives us 100 percent visibility over our medical patients from the initial medical evaluation to discharge, allowing for more intuitive decision-making for the triage folks on the combat end. The result: we’ve had over 3,200 patients evacuated during Operation Iraqi Freedom and have maintained 100 percent visibility over all patients. TRAC2ES is an excellent example of a good IM system contributing to mission accomplishment. Guess where that idea came from? It had roots in our senior NCO corps.

How many of you have seen that movie “Minority Report” with Tom Cruise? One thing it illustrated well was a concept I call a “street smart architecture.” I’m referring to the scene where Tom Cruise is able to wave his electronically gloved hands against holographic images and put together pieces of information to predict when and where a crime was going to happen ... before it actually occurred. Well, a “street smart architecture” would work the same way ... our system would learn daily about your queries and anticipate what information you might need in the future, making you aware of new sources...the moment you log in. You say that happens today...not so! Today you are spammed with data that is often not value added. Instead, we want our systems to give us answers before we even ask, to surprise and astonish us.

## *Advice*

It's human nature to get comfortable with what's familiar, but we can't afford to get complacent in the warfighting business. As Senior NCOs, you must stay abreast of the changes, and teach and mentor our junior enlisted folks to do the same.

How do you reach those young enlisted corps when their natural inclination may be to stick with what's familiar? Here are a few words of advice:

- Your biggest challenge will be those troops who feel disassociated from the mission. Teach them the importance of their contribution to the unit's mission, and it's role in defending our nation.
- Take the time to explain why we're doing something. This is where your knowledge of the "big picture" comes in handy.
- No one stands so tall as he who stoops to help someone else. Never feel that as a Senior NCO, your advice and counsel is not appreciated.
- The power of recognition—a letter, a picture, a pat on the back...all very powerful motivators!
- Always assume that your people want to succeed ... if they're not successful, look at the process. It's our responsibility, *yours and mine*, to give our troops the guidance and resources to be successful.
- As Senior NCOs, you are the managers of your respective career fields...you have a responsibility to identify the skills we lack today or will need tomorrow, and pass that to your functional managers. We call this force development ... find out what skills we should have for our future force.
- You have a responsibility to articulate new technologies or processes, which means first you have to learn it. Becoming a Senior NCO is a loyalty check that will test your commitment to the force like never before in your careers.
- In this era, leading by example could mean: don't be afraid to ask questions you think are not smart.
- Do not underestimate the power of your presence. When someone with a sleeve-full of rockers and chevrons walks into a room, people take notice, especially young troops. Your

calm demeanor in a crisis, your wise advice, your experience and understanding of technological know-how, will all positively affect your troops. Saying “that’s good enough” when it really isn’t, sends the wrong message.

- Always remember: you have a responsibility to the folks above you. They, too, may need you to teach them the details of a new process or system. You *are* the expert your commander is going to rely on, lean on, and reach out to... be ready.
- Real life doesn’t follow a textbook...be ready to handle the unforeseen challenges and accept the responsibility of doing something about it...from counseling the grouching two-striper to proposing changes up the chain of command.

So I think there is a new era of mentoring here...

- Tell those you choose to mentor that their success is your reward! Because they’ll remind you when you’ve succeeded!
- Remember how uplifting it is when people demonstrate they are listening to you! Do that for them!
- Maintain eye contact with those you mentor while talking to them. As a result, they are going to try harder to tell you something you need to know.
- Pass on frequently those all important “attaboys” and “attagirls”.
- Hand-written notes are powerful.
- Teach them the value of loyalty ... loyalty to question why we do it this way.
- Don’t forget that you have a responsibility to yourself, as well. Don’t change those things about yourself that got you to where you are. Take it from me, the more senior you get, the more fleeting the opportunities you have to spend quality time with your family. Make the most of that time.
- Get out from under the email dueling routines! Go network our force.
- Most importantly, remember what the Senior NCO Academy gave you while you were here—the understanding that nothing beats the joint team networking power!

### *Conclusion*

Finally, if we are to remain the world’s premier air, space, land and sea Total Force, change will be inevitable. It’s up to you, as Senior NCOs, to lead the younger troops in adapting to that

change, by accepting responsibility for your own success, that of your unit, and your Service. Remember, your actions speak louder than words, be the example, know the technology, lead and mentor the troops, be the voice of reason, and advise your superiors. Learn the big picture and pass it along. Don't be uninvolved with new technology, be a leader. You will be sending the right message to the next generation of joint force Senior NCOs.

Thank you for inviting me to speak here, it's been an honor. Enjoy the rest of your evening. And again, congratulations!